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ABSTRACT

Parents can help their children master the skills needed to become good writers. While preschool pupils, in most cases, cannot do their own writing, the parents can: ask their children for ideas to include in letters to friends or relatives; write down, and then read back, ideas dictated by the child; read interesting library books to their children; help their first grade children to write short letters, order free materials, or write brief business letters; and discuss business and friendly letters received in the mail. Second and third grade pupils often differ considerably in writing ability--parents should respect each child's level of achievement and assist their children by: encouraging them to write partial or entire letters to friends or family; encouraging children to complete school writing assignments; cooperating with teachers to identify specific areas of help and guidance for each child; and encouraging and participating in creative writing activities in the home. Many intermediate grade pupils can engage in and successfully complete different kinds of written work. Parents can engage their intermediate and upper grade children in writing activities such as poetry writing; writing tall tales, legends, mystery stories, biographies, and autobiographies; writing business and friendly letters, and invitations; writing riddles; and writing plays, jokes, and diary entries. If parents want their children to become increasingly proficient in the area of writing, a supportive environment must be in evidence in the home setting. Parents need to encourage, not force, their children to do a better job of writing. (RS)

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WRITING AND THE CHILD

Writing, the second of the three R's in the school curriculum, is a very vital skill for pupils to develop. It is difficult for many pupils to become good writers. There are many specific skills involved in learning to write. Thus, in the area of writing, pupils need to become skillful in

(a) having legible handwriting.

(b) spelling words correctly.

(c) punctuating sentences correctly.

(d) using capital letters properly.

(e) indenting the first word of a paragraph.

(f) having sentences in proper order within a paragraph, as well as having paragraphs in good sequence.

(g) presenting ideas and content clearly and accurately to the reader.

Thus, there are numerous skills that pupils need to develop to become good writers. What can parents do to aid their children in becoming better writers?

WRITING EXPERIENCES FOR THE PRESCHOOL AND EARLY PRIMARY GRADE PUPILS

Preschool pupils (approximately four years of age) and kindergarten pupils, of course, in most cases cannot do their own writing of words, sentences, and paragraphs. Thus, the parents will

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have to write ideas presented by these young learners. There are selected first grade pupils who can write ideas on paper. The following are recommended experiences for young children in the area of writing:

1. When a parent is writing a friendly letter to a relative or friend, the preschool or early primary grade pupil could be asked for ideas to be included in the written product. The child could even be asked to give exact ideas that the parent could write directly into the letter, as the young learner's contribution. The child may then see talk written down. It is suggested that neat manuscript writing (printed letters and words) be utilized in the friendly letter to record the child's ideas. Manuscript writing is closely related to the appearance of letters and words contained in textbooks and library books for pupils. Cursive writing (commonly called writing in long hand) will be emphasized later when the child has better control of the use of his/her muscles in forming individual letters and words. Most children also begin writing experiences by using manuscript letters before cursive letters since the former are less strenuous to complete.

2. Young children, in many situations, have ideas which need recording. The parent may then use manuscript writing (print) to record content as given by these young learners. The parent should read the printed material back to the child to be certain content

has been recorded as desired by the child. The child with parental help may then read the written content. The parent may point to each word as it is being read. The child should be encouraged, not forced, to engage in diverse kinds of writing experiences. Children may learn to dislike writing if undesirable pressure is applied in learning to write. By working with and being interested in the child, the parent may well get young children interested in the fascinating area of writing.

3. The parent should read interesting library books to young children. These books must be written for young and not older children. Enthusiastic reading by parents is important in order to obtain the attention of young learners. Activities, such as these, may well increase pupil's interest in words and sentences. Becoming interested in words and sentences can increase pupil interest in writing. Young children must be able to read words before these words can be written. Pupils may wish to present ideas for the parent to record, pertaining to the library book being read. The young child again may see talk written down. The child with parent help may read the written content. These are writing experiences for young children. Once pupils at an older age level can write their own ideas, they, of course, should be encouraged to do so.

4. Beginning with the first grade level, selected young pupils are continuously developing proficiency in doing their own

writing. What kind of writing activities in the home setting can these pupils engage in?

(a) These young learners can be encouraged to write all or part of a friendly letter to relatives and friends. The parents may have additional content to write in these letters.

(b) A pupil may wish to order selected inexpensive items from a catalog. With parental help, the child may be assisted to fill in order forms properly from the involved catalog.

(c) A business letter may be written to get answers to a question or to order a free or inexpensive item. Letters of inquiry to have questions answered may be written to a conservation agent, a county farm agent, a boy or a girl scout organization, and/or the mayor and council of a specific city. To order free and inexpensive materials, for example, the parent may help first grade pupils to understand and write the different parts of a business letter.

5. Parents should show and discuss with young children business and friendly letters received in the mail. Thus, kindergarten and first grade pupils may notice the different parts that make up a friendly letter and a business letter. Parents may read the letter or letters to these young learners. This activity should not be forced upon pupils. But rather, children should be encouraged to pursue increased interest in letter writing. Generally, learnings forced upon pupils make for negative feelings toward

letter writing and other fomrs of written work. Selected nursery school, kindergarten, and first grade pupils may be interested in looking at

(a) announcements of meeting to be held in school, such as open house and parent teacher organization meetings.

(b) colorful advertisments in newspapers and in magazines.

(c) printed commercials on quality television programs.

(d) printed programs pertaining to plays attended, e.g. the diverse scenes and acts, characters in the play, and sponsors of the play.

The parent must remember that young children may obtain beginning or rudimentary learnings only, pertaining to written content in announcements, advertisements, printed commercials, and programs. The purpose in these activities would be to obtain pupil interests in noticing that printed materials convey ideas and information. Thus, reading and writing can be fascinating, challenging ways to communicate ideas to others. Reading and writing experiences should become enjoyable activities for pupils.

WRITING EXPERIENCES FOR LATE PRIMARY GRADE PUPILS

Pupils, in grades two and three, differ much from each other in writing achievement. There are selected second and third grade pupils who are good writers for their age level. Others may be achieving at a level in writing commensurate with many kindergarten and first grade pupils. Parents should not criticize the present level of achievement in writing for any one pupil. Each child must

be respected and assisted to achieve as much as possible in the area of writing. How can parents help these second and third grade pupils in writing in the home setting?

1. These pupils may write partial or entire letters to friends, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Parents should not force, but encourage pupil participation in these kinds of writing activities.

2. Teachers in the school setting may require homework involving writing activities. Thus, if a child is required to write a book report, a suitable place for doing homework should be provided. The study area should be quiet, comfortable, and conducive for studying. Parents should praise pupils for working on and completing homework assignments. Once a child has completed homework activities, a reasonable reward, beyond praise, may be in the offering, as promised by parents. These rewards may include the child choosing what he/she would like to do within the framework of a favorable range of choices. Thus, buying games or library books, eating in a restaurant, going swimming, or an increased allowance may be given to pupils when adequate, reasonable effort is put forth in learning to write. The home setting must encourage pupils to achieve as much as possible. Writing is no exception!

3. During parent-teacher conferences in the school-class setting, specific help and guidance in each curriculum area should be pinpointed for pupils. With home and school cooperation, parents can do much to help pupils achieve well in the area of writing.

If a pupil does not use legible handwriting, as identified in a parent-teacher conference, help in the home setting may be given to assist learners in proper letter formation, spacing of letters and words, alignment of letters and words (staying on the line in writing), and slant of letters. Help given to a pupil in writing legibly should end in successful, not forced, achievement.

If spelling words correctly is a problem for pupils, the parent can help in the following areas:

(a) correctly spelling to the involved pupil a word or words as needed in writing activities.

(b) assisting pupils to proofread what has been written. Pinpoint incorrectly spelled words.

(c) helping learners associate sounds with letters as new words are being spelled.

(d) playing spelling games with pupils; these may be purchased or made in the home setting. The teacher of the pupil may be consulted pertaining to the addresses of commercial companies that sell spelling games. Teachers also should have much knowledge pertaining to the construction of games to be utilized in spelling. For example, the parent and the pupil may neatly cut out fish from different colors of construction paper. A relevant spelling word should be printed in accurate manuscript letters on each "fish." A stick with a piece of string and an attached magnet may represent the fishing pole. A metal paper clip should be attached to the mouth of each fish. If a pupil "catches" a fish and can spell

the involved word correctly, the learner may keep the fish in his/her collection. If a pupil incorrectly spells a word, the "fish" must be thrown back in the "water". The child should be encouraged to catch as many fish as possible.

4. Creative writing activities can be fascinating for pupils. Thus, the pupil could be encouraged to write verse pertaining to content in a library book which has been read. The parent may also write a poem and read it to the pupil. It can be a good model for pupils to hear parents read their own composed verse. The following kinds of verse may be written by pupils or by parents who share ideas written with their children in the home setting:

1. couplets-- two lines of verse, somewhat uniform in length, in which ending words rhyme.

2. triplets-- three lines of verse, somewhat uniform in length. The ending words of each line rhyme.

3. quatrains-- four lines of verse. Lines one and two, as well as lines three and four may rhyme. There can be other patterns of rhyme, such as line one and three, as well as lines two and four rhyming.

4. limericks-- five lines are inherent in this type of verse. Limericks generally start with the words--"There once was". However, varied approaches may be utilized to initiate the writing of limericks. In a limerick, lines one, two, and five rhyme. Whereas, lines three and four also rhyme. Both the parent and the child generally enjoy writing limericks!

5. haiku verse-- contain three lines. Line one contains five syllables, whereas line two has seven syllables and line three five syllables.

Pupils should be encouraged to write the kinds of verse in which they can be successful learners. A lack of success generally makes for a poor self concept. If a pupil presently cannot write a specific kind of verse, at a later time this is always a possibility.

WRITING ACTIVITIES FOR INTERMEDIATE AND UPPER GRADE PUPILS

Parents need to remember that pupils do not become excellent writers at once with no previous growth and experience in good writing activities. Writing is a skill which requires continuous development. Thus, quality writing experiences for young learners, as previously discussed, are necessary in order that intermediate and upper grade pupils may experience continuous progress. To experience continuous progress and success in writing is very important for each pupil. Again, it should be stressed that a pupil will not all of a sudden become a good writer. Rather the pupil must practice diverse kinds of writing activities over a rather long period of time and be successful in these experiences. What we do not experience success in, we generally do not enjoy. Writing activities are no exception.

Many intermediate grade pupils can engage in and successfully complete different kinds of written work. There are selected learners who may be achieving on the primary grade level in writing.

Pressuring pupils to achieve at a higher level than their capabilities permit generally makes for feelings of resentment toward writing. A sympathetic, understanding parent, who offers assistance to children in the area of writing when this help is needed, may truly be an outstanding teacher! There are teachers in the school setting who attempt to force pupils to learn that which is not possible. Pupils then learn to dislike what the school has to offer.

Which learning activities in the area of writing may parents give guidance to their children?

1. writing poetry. (See previously given definitions for writing couplets, triplets, quatrains, limericks, and haiku poems.)

2. Writing tall tales, legends, mystery stories, adventure stories, biographies, and autobiographies. Library books can be check out at the school library or the public library which pupils and parents may read to obtain models pertaining to the above listed kinds of writing activities. For example, content read on Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill may reveal the following standards to follow in pupils engaging in the writing of tall tales:

(a) A character or characters in the tall tale must have super human strength.

(b) These superhuman individuals get into situations involving mischief and complexity.

(c) Tall tales must include means of the individual getting out of the complex situations.

There, of course, are also standards to follow in writing legends, mystery and adventure stories, biographies, and autobiographies. Fables and fairy tales may well provide additional purposes for pupils in writing. Reading books and stories pertaining to these diverse kinds of content can provide excellent models and standards for pupils' creative writing, e.g. Aesop's fables. The classroom teacher has suggestions for parents to utilize in guiding pupils to engage in diverse kinds of writing activities.

3. Writing business and friendly letters. Parents need to encourage their children to write business letters to order free an inexpensive materials. Pupils may also write friendly letters to friends, relatives, and neighbors. Business letters should contain the following parts:

(a) Heading
Street address or route number of sender
City, State, zip code number
Today's date.

(b) Inside Address
Name of person or company written to
Street address of this person or company
City, State, and zip code number

(c) Greeting
e.g. Dear Sir or Dear Sirs:

(d) Body of the business letter containing the exact, precise content to communicate effectively with the addressee.

(e) Closing
e.g. Sincerely, or Sincerely yours,

(f) Signature of sender

Parents should guide pupils to understand why the different parts, as listed above, are needed in a business letter. For example, the inside address is needed in a business letter in order that the addressee knows the received letter has reached the proper destination. Individuals, of course, have placed the wrong business letter in an envelope. Pupils, of course, find it easy to see purpose in having an attached signature to a business letter. The company or individual receiving the letter needs to know who sent the letter. For each part of a business letter, pupils need to sense reasons for its inclusion.

The following may serve as a model for parent utilization in guiding their children to write friendly letters:

(a) Heading

Route Two
Kirksville, Missouri 63501
September __, 19____

(b) Greeting

Dear Kent,

(c) Body of friendly letter

I felt initially that my eight weeks working at the Boy Scout camp would be long and cumbersome. However, four short weeks have already elapsed. I still prepare the food and take care of the dishes each day. I find that each new sets of Scouts that come to camp are different as well as interesting. There is never a dull moment when completing my work in the kitchen. I will be home for a visit next weekend.

(d) Closing

Your brother,

(e) Signature

As was true in writing friendly letters, the parent should assist the child to understand why the different parts of a friendly letter are needed. There is, of course, a purpose for including each part. Thus, the date of a friendly letter is necessary as a significant part since the reader will want to know approximately when the happenings written in the body took place. Letters have gotten lost in the mail for a period of a month, or even several years, before the actual destination is reached.

4. Writing invitations. Pupils celebrate their birthdays in the home setting by inviting selected friends. It is important to get pupils involved in the writing of invitations. Thus, pupils, obtain additional practice in writing. Each pupil should know and understand which content is necessary to write in an invitation. Thus, in writing invitations for peers to attend a birthday party, the five following questions need answering: who, what, why, where, and when. The following is presented as a model for the writing of invitations to attend a party.

You (who) are invited to attend a birthday party (what) in honor of John's eleventh birthday (why). The birthday party will be held at the Alfred Miller home, located at 218 East Lyon Street, across the street from the Upper Elementary School (where), on August 5, 19___ at 4:00 P.M. (when). The party will end at 6:00 P.M.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Miller

There are reasons for including answers to the five w's (who, what, why, where, and when) in a letter of invitation that is being or has been written. For example, the receiver of the invitation will want to know when the event is occurring. Otherwise, it is impossible to know when to arrive at a party. Pupils achieve at a higher level if they understand the reasons for writing specific ideas in a written product.

5. Writing riddles. Riddles fascinate many pupils. Parents may read or tell riddles to elementary age pupils. Intermediate grade, and in many cases primary grade pupils, may read riddles to themselves. Following these listening and reading activities pertaining to riddles, pupils may be stimulated to engage in the writing of riddles. Background information is necessary to write riddles. The following is presented as a model for a riddle.

I live in a forest or jungle.
I am a very strong animal.
I am larger than a cat whom I resemble in appearance.
I have stripes.
Who am I?

6. Other writing experiences. There are numerous other writing experiences for pupils to participate in with the encouragement of parents. These include:

(a) Writing plays. There usually is a story or more in a school basal reader which is written in terms of having play parts. The exact words to be read by a character in a play are presented in the readers. Stories from a reader may be rewritten in play parts.

(b) Writing jokes.

(c) Writing diary entries. These entries, of course, should be written on a day to day basis. The pupil needs to write that which is relevant for each day.

IN SUMMARY

If parents want their children to become increasingly proficient in the area of writing, a supportive environment must be in evidence in the home setting. The teacher can assist each pupil to become a better writer. However, the teacher, alone, cannot complete this task. Parents need to encourage, not force, their children to do a better job of writing. This may well mean to discuss writing with children and write with them. Parents, also, need to set an example for children in writing when the former engages in completing business and friendly letters, poems, notes of sympathy, and thank you letters, among others. Thus, parents reveal to children that writing is relevant and vital since they (the parents) write to communicate with others.